

OTIS PLAYGROUND / Otis and Dana Streets
Community Meeting No. 1
Tuesday, June 3, 2014

Location: East Somerville Community School Cafeteria. 6:30 – 8:00 PM

Meeting attendees included 14 East Somerville neighbors of Otis Playground, Alderman Matt McLaughlin, and State Representative Tim Toomey.

Attendees of the meeting represented a cross-section of age groups, including teens and older residents. Translators were available and used for both Spanish and Portuguese. In general, residents were very supportive of the park renovation, and the primary concerns were with regards to security and improvements to the portion of the park at the base of the pedestrian bridge.

Meeting Agenda:

Director of Parks and Open Space Arn Franzen introduced the project, presented a PowerPoint slide show, and then opened the floor for questions and comments.

Audience concerns and comments are listed below:

1. Good lighting and better visibility were frequently mentioned as the primary need at the playground.
2. Neighbors said the main security problem areas after-hours were people hiding on top of and under the bridge, and while the value of the bridge as a pedestrian route was appreciated, many said the neighborhood and the park would be better off if the bridge and ramp were completely removed.
3. Several residents said the concrete on the bridge is in bad shape and looked dangerous. Pieces of concrete are falling off and metal rebar is sticking out.
4. The parent of a teen that died of a drug overdose emphasized the problem of drug use in the playground.
5. Another parent who emphasized her own experience as a youth said visibility was a real issue and recommended that cameras be installed. Many others agreed.
6. Friends of another youth that died suggested some form of public artwork for youth, or a memorial for neighborhood teens.
7. The concrete bridge that divides the park is low and prevents access between the two halves of the playground. The structure blocks visibility, eliminates headroom, and requires people to duck under it.
8. As a remedy people suggested lowering the grade under the bridge ramp, and transitioning the high and low grades to blend the two sections of the park together and provide better access and ADA accessibility.

9. Installing fencing on the rooftops of adjacent buildings was suggested as teens hang out at the park after hours and climb onto adjacent rooftops to party
10. Residents said police do patrol the area but they need to get out of their cars more often.
11. Many residents said the single entrance into the park was a problem and a second gate should be installed. People also said the park has no circulation system.
12. People suggested incorporating contoured steps and planters as transition landscape elements between the high and low elevations.
13. Turf was suggested as a surfacing element as grass does not do well. People also advocated for real grass, and rubber poured in place (“foam”) surfacing.
14. Residents asked for running space for their children. Park circulation was discussed again and new pathways were suggested.
15. The sidewalks around the park are in poor condition and more street trees should be planted.
16. The park should have more natural elements and include things like boulders for seating.
17. The park needs nice benches and spaces to sit on and visit, but only in visible areas.
18. Most of the tall shrubs in the playground should be removed as people hide behind them and use them as bathrooms.
19. Dogs also use the park for a bathroom and the No Dog rules should be enforced.
20. The State should clean up McGrath Highway and Dana Street. There is a lot of trash and several trees have died and should be replaced.
21. The playground should consider elements for little children, before elements for teens.
22. Children’s play features should explore alternative play elements and items including learning activities. The park should have educational elements. Perhaps an alphabet.
23. The building walls round the park could be turned into climbing walls.
24. The play structure is not in bad shape but broken parts should be removed.
25. The play structure should be moved farther back in the park to open up visibility and so that the portions of the park closer to the street can be used for something else.
26. The entire play structure should be removed and replaced with something more appropriate.
27. Include mirrors in the park to help people see around the corners.
28. There should include an educational mural like the one at the South Street Farm.

